



OFFICE OF MAYOR VIRG BERNERO
124 W. MICHIGAN AVENUE – NINTH FLOOR
LANSING, MI 48933

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, March 22, 2016

CONTACT: Randy Hannan
517/483-4147

Mayor Bernero Delivers 11th State of the City Address, Focuses on Accelerating Progress in Lansing and the Metro Region

(LANSING) - Highlighting the city's progress during his tenure as mayor over the past decade, Mayor Virg Bernero tonight delivered his 11th State of the City Address at the facilities of one of metro Lansing's most advanced technology companies, Niowave, which builds nuclear particle accelerators and related products.

Bernero noted that metro Lansing has made major progress over the last decade, even through the worst economic crisis in a generation, by making tough decisions that resulted in a leaner, more efficient city government. He noted that unemployment has fallen to its lowest level since 2007, that the region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) continues to grow, that foreclosures are down and home sale prices are on the rise, and that Lansing has finally reversed a 40-year trend of population losses with three straight years of population growth.

"As we begin 2016, the state of our city is strong and getting stronger," Bernero said. "We've come a long way in the past decade, despite facing the most challenging economic times in a generation."

Mayor Bernero hailed progress made by his Administration in restoring city government to fiscal stability through prudent financial management, adding more than \$2 million to city reserves at the end of the last fiscal year.

"Our expenses no longer systematically exceed our revenues, and that means we've effectively eliminated Lansing's structural deficit," Mayor Bernero said. "Next week, my administration's track record of prudent fiscal management will continue: I will announce my third straight city budget that begins with a surplus rather than a deficit."

Calling attention to his efforts to resolve the city's legacy costs, Bernero noted that his Administration is "intensely focused" on tackling long-term obligations for pensions and retiree health care.

[more]

“We’ve made major progress at the bargaining table to reduce our unfunded liabilities, saving taxpayers more than \$200 million,” he said. “Now, with matching funds from the Michigan Department of Treasury and guidance from my Financial Health Team, led by former Mayor David Hollister, we are moving forward to find long-term solutions to the legacy cost challenges that plague so many American cities.”

The mayor also noted that new investment in Lansing, facilitated by his administration and the Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP), passed the \$2 billion mark in 2015, thanks to major investments by General Motors, Jackson National Life and many others. He touted the reinvention of the Michigan Avenue Corridor -- “our Miracle Mile” -- through the Red Cedar Renaissance and SkyVue on Michigan projects, as well as Sparrow Health System’s expansion of their Michigan Avenue campus.

Mayor Bernero outlined a bold proposal to make a “50-year decision” about the location of city facilities, including City Hall, the Lansing Police Department and its detention facility, and the 54-A District Court. Under the mayor’s plan, the existing City Hall would be sold and the proceeds invested in renovating the former Lake Trust Credit Union on South Capitol in downtown Lansing. Bernero said the renovation of the Lake Trust building is estimated to cost just half of what would be required to bring the existing City Hall up to modern standards.

The project would also spark the redevelopment of an entire city block, in partnership with Lake Trust, to bring new developments to the site that could include commercial, retail and residential.

“The new City Hall would be a refurbished model, a lightly-worn but perfectly useable building in a location that’s much more accessible to our customers -- the citizens of Lansing,” Bernero said. “It will also be the linchpin -- the anchor presence -- that will spark the redevelopment of an entire city block at a key location between the downtown core and REO Town.”

Bernero applauded recent efforts by the Lansing Board of Water and Light to help the City of Flint replace thousands of lead pipes that contributed to the Flint water crisis. He noted that the BWL partnered with him to get the lead pipes out of Lansing -- a job that is nearly complete - and thanked BWL for their technical assistance to Flint.

At the speech, Mayor Bernero was joined by Flint Mayor Karen Weaver and Flint Council President Kerry Nelson, as well as officials representing the Lansing School District, Sparrow Health System and the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce, for the signing of an historic Sister Cities agreement -- the first such agreement between Lansing and another Michigan city -- to establish a framework for additional cooperation between the two communities in the areas of education, business, health care, the arts and other endeavors.

Bernero noted that the Flint lead poisoning crisis also highlights the need to continue working to eradicate lead paint in older Lansing homes that can threaten the health of young children and pregnant women. The mayor announced that his Fiscal Year 2017 budget, which he will unveil next week, will include funding to test high-risk Lansing homes for lead paint. The city will then partner with the Ingham County Health Department to secure state and federal funding to remediate lead paint hazards revealed by the testing program.

[more]

Mayor Bernero also announced a new neighborhood wellness initiative -- Block by Block (B3) -- that will develop specific strategies for every neighborhood in the city to improve the quality of life of Lansing residents.

“Working directly with our residents, we will take stock of each neighborhood’s assets and opportunities, as well as its challenges,” Bernero said. “Then we will collaboratively design a plan, whether it is focused on housing, walking and biking, crime prevention, beautification or other revitalization strategies. Together, we will create a tailor-made plan for every neighborhood in Lansing.”

Adding to his emphasis on neighborhoods, Bernero also announced that he will propose a new position in city government to tackle challenges in the city’s rental housing stock, and to assist Lansing residents who experience problems with their landlord.

“The budget I propose next week will include a new Lansing Housing Ombudsman so our code officers can focus on their jobs, while the Ombudsman helps diagnose and fix housing issues and advocates for those least able to stand up for themselves,” Bernero said.

Mayor Bernero also called for changes to state law to allow cities to register and inspect properties that are under land contract, the same way the city inspects rental properties to ensure they are safe and meet city codes. “It is a loophole that must be closed,” he said.

Mayor Bernero noted his Administration’s progress on Lansing 3.0, his initiative to leverage the power of technology to make city government more efficient, more cost-effective and more customer-focused, including paperless document management and new tablets for city field crews to help them work more efficiently. The city will soon unveil a new smartphone app, Bernero said, that will help citizens connect with their city government, as well as a new city website that will be even more accessible and convenient for city residents.

To provide Lansing’s first responders with the latest technology, Bernero announced that the city recently received 100 body-worn cameras that Lansing Police Chief Mike Yankowski will soon deploy in the field to keep Lansing residents and police officers even safer.

Mayor Bernero also noted that LPD is hiring and needs good people to join the force.

“We especially need young men and women of color so our police force reflects the rich diversity of the community they serve,” Bernero said. “LPD enjoys strong support across our community and it is a great place to launch a career in law enforcement. If you are interested, please call our Human Resources Department at 483-4004.”

Bernero concluded his annual address by calling for Lansing voters to support the Lansing School District’s Pathway Promise millage election on May 3. “The Pathway Promise is an educational roadmap for our kids that provides them with a path to career and college readiness and links them to the thriving business community in our city,” Bernero said. “The Lansing School District has the lowest school millage rate in Ingham County. It’s time now to invest in our young people by voting YES for the Pathway Promise bond election on May 3.”